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ABSTRACT

Focusing on four methods of teacher evaluation (principal visits, student evaluations, achievement tests, and peer evaluations), attitudes of elementary and secondary school teachers in Florida and Utah were gathered through interviews and questionnaires. Teachers expressed little or no hostility to principal visits, but viewed them as perfunctory and not relevant to improving teaching. Attitudes toward student evaluations were evenly distributed into three positions, with secondary school teachers tending to be more positive than elementary teachers. Teacher interpretation of student input appeared to be a critical factor. Teachers were so overwhelmingly negative on the use of achievement tests for evaluation, the question was discontinued after 15 interviews. Objections focused on the causal link between teacher performance and student outcomes. Although generally positive about peer evaluations, teachers expressed reservations about increasing professional competitiveness, and ability to evaluate individual teaching styles. Teachers' responses reflect a professional naivete and lack of knowledge of teacher evaluation practices. (ES)

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An Interview Study of Teachers' Attitudes Toward Teacher Evaluation Practices

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PRECIS

Teachers' attitudes toward teacher evaluation practices were investigated through structured interviews. Sixty elementary and secondary teachers were questioned about their attidues toward teacher evaluation in general as well as specific evaluation practices such as use of standardized tests, peer review and student reports. Analysis of the interviews revealed four major themes: 1) doubts about current practices, 2) bad experiences in the past, 3) teachers' lack of control of contributing circumstances, and 4) the impact of teacher evaluation on peer relationships in a school.

Increased national interest in and debate on teacher evaluation underscores the need for increased understanding of teachers' attitudes toward this topic. At a philosophical level the idea of professionalism demands that teachers' perspectives be considered in the design of any evaluation system. Other professionals have input into the ways in which they are evaluated (Ritzer, 1977). At a pragmatic level, the views of teachers on the validity of various teacher evaluation practices influences their acceptance of these practices, and ultimately their levels of support for the total system.

Our study of Utah and Florida teachers used two data sources to investigate teachers' attitudes toward evaluation practices. The primary source was sixty teacher interviews. These included 17 males and 43 females; 37 elementary and 23 secondary; and 38 urban and 22 rural. The sample ranged in experience from first year teachers to teachers with 33 years of experience.

The interview consisted of twenty-six demographic and open-ended questions. Of the latter, nine were adapted from Lortie's (1975) study assessing teachers' goals and orientations to teaching, while the other fourteen questions sought teachers' views on specific aspects of the teacher evaluation process. Approximately half the evaluation questions assessed teacher perceptions of current practices and procedures while the other half measured their perceptions of specific evaluation methods such as peer review, student evaluations, and the use of standardized test scores.

All interview questions were supplemented with structured probe questions to elicit elaborated responses.

The second source of data was a 23 item questionnaire administered to 168 teachers. This sample represented 46 male and 122 female, and 94 elementary and 74 secondary teachers. All were from urban or suburban populations and 93 of the teachers were from Utah and 75 from Florida. Initial analysis showed no differences between the Utah and Florida groups, so the data were subsequently pooled. The questionnaire employed a Likert format in which teachers were asked to rate the validity of various teacher evaluation practices on a scale from 1 (invalid) to 7 (valid). (See Appendix A).

Our analysis of this data focused on four methods of evaluating teachers: principal visits, student reports, achievement test scores, and peer evaluations. These four were selected not only for their prevalence in the teacher evaluation literature (Bolton, 1973; Borich, 1977; Millman, 1981) but also for their potential promise of acceptance by districts. Our discussion of these will begin with principal visits, the most commonly occurring teacher evaluation practice in place today.

Principal Visits

Blumberg (1980) described the relationship between administrative supervisors and teachers as a "Cold War". An overriding impression that emerged from our interviews is a somewhat surprising one--the lack of negativity on the part of teachers to the principal supervisory visit. Our interviews showed little or no hostility to either the concept or

practice of such visits. Instead, teachers viewed them as being perfunctory, with little or no impact on actual teaching practice.

The following questions were asked to determine teachers' reactions to the supervisory visit:

> How are you officially or formally evaluated?
>
> Does this visit or practice work for you; does it improve your teaching?
>
> Are you being evaluated fairly and usefully by the present system?

The response to the first question was fairly standard. The vast majority identified principals visiting to evaluate, with a few (4%) reporting other administrative personnel coming into the classroom.

The second question elicited more variety of responses, which tended to cluster around the ineffectiveness of such visits and the reasons for this ineffectiveness. Principal visits were seen for the most part as perfunctory, designed more to maintain the status quo than to improve instruction or evaluate. Several quotes illustrate this. One teacher, when asked why the principal came into her classroom responded, "Because she has to fill out her forms for her immediate supervisors." Another teacher noted that these visits were not intended to improve instruction but were "To satisfy an administrative need." A third teacher responded, "The amount of evaluation hasn't done anything one way or another for my teaching - the thing that makes me be a 'good teacher' is the students themselves and how you can feel about them." This last comment concurs

with Lortie's (1975) finding that teachers look to the students in the classroom for indications of their teaching performance, rather than to outside sources.

The major problems with principal supervisory visits centered around lack of applicability, brevity, lack of rigor, and unknowledgeable principals. By far the largest reaction to these visits (33% of the teachers) was their non-relevance. ("It's fair but not really useful.") The majority of teachers did not see these visits as being instrumental in improving their teaching.

A partial explanation for this latter view related to the teachers' perceptions of the principal's lack of supervisory or instructional competence. This theme arose in different ways at different levels. At the elementary level several of the teachers commented on the fact that the principal had not had direct teaching experience at that particular level. This was a problem identified by Trask (1964) in her study of elementary school principals. At the secondary level the problem of evaluator competence centered around subject matter knowledge. Secondary teachers voiced discomfort at being evaluated by someone who was not an expert in their particular subject matter area.

In addition to the competence of the principal, teachers also identified length and frequency of visits as a major evaluation problem. Several other researchers in the area have uncovered similar problems. Osmond (1978) in his questionnaire study of teachers' attitudes found that 57% of the respondents said that not enough time was devoted to evaluation,

and recommended more and longer visits as desireable changes in the evaluation procedure. Rothberg and Buchanon (1981) surveyed 105 elementary and secondary teachers and found that brevity and infrequency were the second most mentioned negative aspect of evaluation visits (after stress). These same teachers called for observations that were longer, more frequent and more informative.

The overall picture that emerges is one of acceptance of principal visits as a necessary evil or nuisance, but a general lack of acceptance as a tool for instructional improvement. Data from our questionnaire substantiate this interpretation. Of ten evaluation practices rated by our respondents in terms of validity, classroom visits received a 4.57 (on a 1 to 7 Likert scale where 1 was invalid and 7 was valid). This score placed principal visits 6th out of the 10 practices rated. According to our data, competence and commitment appear to be major obstacles.

When supervisory visits "worked", two factors emerged from our interviews. One was that the visits were perceived as supportive and provided reassurance to the teacher. (One teacher responded that it "...was nice to get strokes.") The other positive factor was the expertise of the principal; when this was viewed positively the supervisory visits were described as having value.

Student Evaluations

When quieried about the value of student evaluations, the teachers

in our sample were fairly equally distributed into three positions. One third felt that student evaluations were valuable sources of information but this group also indicated that professional judgement needed to be exercised in interpreting these evaluations. The middle third was skeptically accepting of student reports, advocating their use but also cautioning that "five grains of salt be used in their interpretation." The remaining third openly doubted the ability of students to provide valid or reliable feedback about teaching performance.

The percentage of teachers raising doubts about the use of student evaluations was proportionally greatest at the elementary level and least at the secondary level. While only 38% of the total sample was positive, 73% of the secondary teachers approved of student reports. In a similar way there was a disproportionate number of elementary teachers against the use of student evaluation, 78% of the negative group were elementary teachers versus 62% of the general sample.

Teachers who were positive toward the use of student evaluations saw the amount of time exposure as crucial to their value. As one teacher explained, "Students are here everyday. . . . I think often times students know before anyone else if a teacher is incompetent." Identification of the time element is a significant one in light of our previous discussion of brevity as a major impediment to principal visits. In expressing their approval of such evaluations, teachers also qualified this approval by

carefully limiting their topics of report to affective rather than technical instructional considerations. Teachers felt that students were good at telling what (e.g. assignments, topics, etc.) and who they liked, but were not good at making judgements of competence.

Teachers in the middle group were somewhat more skeptical of the value of student evaluations. Their hesitations centered around students' perceived inability to differentiate between good and popular teachers. As one elementary teacher put it, "If they like the teacher - the teacher is good." Another elementary teacher explained, "They aren't prepared to evaluate teachers - there are too many personal things - based on if they like you." Teachers in this group thought there was value in these subjective expressions of affect but cautioned against transitory expressions of like or dislike being equated with teaching performance.

Teachers negative to student evaluations focused on the inability of students to understand the complexities of teaching, which often was attributed to students being too young to understand what was being evaluated. Teachers in this category were also concerned about emotions influencing these evaluations (e.g. student was mad at the time) and whether students could differentiate between favorite and competent.

Interpretation of the data on student evaluations is a complex task. Lortie (1975) found that teachers evaluate their work through their interactions with students. When queried as to how good teachers gauge the effectiveness of their teaching, 59% suggested "general observation of students in light of teacher's conception of what should be learned."

(1975, p. 74). The next highest data source suggested by teachers, results of tests and exams, was named by only 14% of the teachers. Lortie suggested that not only do teachers turn to students as a source of data, but also as a source of professional and psychic rewards.

Our interview and questionnaire data suggest that the interpretation of student input by the teacher is a critical factor. Teachers in the questionnaire sample gave student evaluations a 4.25 out of a possible 7 in terms of validity, which gave this data source a ranking of 7 out of 10 aternative evaluation techniques. Though teachers appear to gauge the effectiveness of their work through the nature of the interactions with students, they have much less confidence in what students say about these interactions. The quality of this interaction must be gauged directly by teachers as they work with students and not after the fact by students.

The difference in these two data forms can be seen in one teacher's response to our questions. When asked how she could tell when she had a good day she responded, "No crying - sometimes in first grade - no crying. If they're cheerful when they go out, When they say, 'Goodbye Mrs....' or when they come up to me and say, 'Look what I got on my paper today'." When asked about student evaluations the same teacher responded, "Oh, I've never gone for that . . . I think that the little kids (well maybe the big kids either) cannot understand the overall picture of teaching as a whole thing."

Achievement Tests

Of our interview sample of 60 teachers, 15 were asked about the use

of achievement scores to evaluate teachers. The responses were so strong and uniformly against the practice that the question was discontinued in the study and other questions added. Data from our questionnaire and a recently completed study (Note 1) support the conclusion of teachers' overwhelming negativity to the use of achievement test scores to evaluate teachers.

Of the 15 teachers queried in the study, only one reacted positively to the practice of evaluating teachers through the use of achievement test scores. This one elementary teacher reacted in this way,

> "In a way that's what its all about--how much you are giving your children. It is sort of a test for the teachers to see if they are putting over the subject matter in a way that the children are getting it. I think it is a pretty fair evaluation of the teacher."

Other teachers responded quite differently to this question. Of the remaining 14, two teachers were neutral to the idea while 12 (80%) were opposed. Opposition to the practice centered around two positions, one questioning the validity of the test to assess student performance (Teachers uniformly interpreted the term "achievement tests" to mean standardized achievement tests), and two, the validity of such tests for measuring teacher ability or performance.

Arguments against the validity of standardized achievement tests as measures of student learning focused on the content validity of the tests as well as administration procedures. One teacher summed up the first position in this way.

> "I don't think much of it (using tests to evaluate teachers) because I don't think much of achievement tests period. . .

> for evaluating anything other than what the kids are doing when they take the test. So I wouldn't want them to be used for evaluation purposes."

Another teacher commented that achievement tests only measured one half of the curriculum and that the use of such tests for evaluation purposes would only worsen the present problem of teachers teaching to the test. Other teachers commented on the problem encountered in administering tests in the classroom. Here, difficulty and length of tests and quessing were mentioned. One teacher summed up these problems, "They're so long, and kids get so tired. . . and bored with it and guess a lot."

The other objection teachers had to using achievement tests to evaluate teachers focused on the validity of such tests as measures of teaching performance. This point is well represented by one teacher's comment. "I just don't think it's valid. . . what matters is what you can do in the class every day."

The problems identified in this area focused on the causal link between teacher performance and student outcomes. Teachers felt that performance on a test administered one year may not be wholly dependent on that year's teacher's performance but rather was the result of the efforts of many teachers.

> "It is done but I don't think it is right, because children learn at different growth levels - sometimes in spurts - sometimes leveling off. In certain grades you see much more improvement than in other grades. It is not just one teacher for one year but all the teachers put together through the years."

Another teacher commented on the problems caused by ability grouping

in various classrooms.

> "That's terrible (using achievement tests to evaluate teaching) because some years you have children that are really achievers - other years you don't. It is not a fair reflection of the teacher's ability. Our students are grouped according to ability - one room has top achievers - the gifted and talented. If they did (evaluate teachers by achievement test scores) they'd surely have to divide the groups differently than we do now."

A third teacher mentioned the effect of outside influences, such as home and experiential background on the performance of student on achievement tests.

The findings of two previous researchers in this area are relevant. Both Cooley (1981) and Paulin (1981) found that teachers' receptivity to evaluation practices was dependent upon their perceived control of the component being evaluated. If teachers do not feel they have control over a part of their teaching, such as student performance on an achievement test, then they do not want to be evaluated on this measure.

Further evidence for teachers' negative attitudes toward the use of standardized achievement tests for evaluation purposes comes from our questionnaire data and a study done by Glasman. When asked to rate the validity of standardized achievement tests as a measure of teacher competence, the teachers in our sample gave this procedure an average rating of 3.95 out of 7, the lowest of the ten techniques rated. Further evidence for teacher negativity toward this method of evaluation can be found in Glasman's (1974) case study of merit pay implementation problems in a district. Using the criteria of student achievement for merit was listed by teachers in the district as the second least desirable feature of a prospective

merit play plan (out of seven features). Being evaluated by other district administrators was rated least desirable.

Two final comments should be made about teachers' responses to this topic. The first is the strength and intensity of their responses. Unlike some of the other topics, teachers were not hesitant in responding to this item; they had opinions and they voiced them strongly. This could probably be explained by the fact that teachers had past experiences with this practice in that achievement test scores have often been used informally to "evaluate" teachers. The other aspect of these responses that is noteworthy is that none of the teachers mentioned technical ways of making achievement tests more valid, such as the use of pre- and post-tests, or the use of such tests over a number of years to increase reliability. Evidently, procedures such as these have not been a part of teachers' professional training.

Peer Evaluations

In response to the question, "How do you feel about teachers evaluating other teachers?" the teachers in our sample were, for the most part, positive. Reservations centered around the potential disturbance of professional relations in a school and the problematic nature of evaluating what teachers felt to be a highly idiosyncratic enterprise. If interpreted as primarily a formative exercise, teachers saw a number of benefits accruing from the information gained through such sharing.

The most consistent concern voiced by teachers when asked about peer evaluation was the possibility that this practice would lead to increased

professional competition and isolation in schools. The teachers in the sample used such phrases as "spying," "jealousy," "personality clashes," "bitter and resentful," and "dog eat dog," to describe the possible consequences of a peer evaluation system in a school. In response to this perceived problem, over one third of the respondents spontaneously suggested that peer evaluators be recruited from different schools to minimize the potential for such problems.

The background of the evaluator was also mentioned, with a number of the respondents spontaneously suggesting that the peer evaluators come from the same subject matter area or from the same grade level. The concern was that the evaluator be knowledgeable about the problems and conditions encountered by the teacher being evaluated. If these concerns about matching subject matter and grade level could be met, most teachers felt comfortable with their peers evaluating them. As one teacher put it.

> "I think that more than anyone else, another teacher can appreciate the problems you're dealing with, more than a parent, more than an administrator, more than kids. I think they have more of a feel for what you're trying to do and what you're working with."

Interestingly, the idea of serving as an evaluator was not met with the same enthusiasm. Part of this resistance to summatively evaluating peers came from hesitations about professional roles and part from concerns about professional self-competence. In terms of the former, teachers do not see the responsibility for evaluating teachers as part of their role definition. In this respect one teacher commented,

> "It seems like spying on each other. For the administrator that's a part of the job and he is expected to evaluate the staff."

The other hesitation voiced by teachers about evaluating other teachers had to do with professional competence or expertise. One teacher described the problem this way,

> "I just don't feel I am professional enough to evaluate another teacher. . . "

Another explanation for teachers' resistance to evaluating other teachers can be found in teachers' perception of teaching as an idiosyncratic activity. This is best summed up by one teacher who responded,

> "I think that you're treading on very delicate ground when . . . when you ask a teacher to evaluate another teacher, because we all teach differently and I might get results out of a kid that another teacher may not and another teacher might do things that I would never dream of doing . . .. "

Another teacher was concerned that these idiosyncratic ways of teaching would filter into any evaluation system,

> "Everybody has a different idea about how to evaluate - you're doing a comparison with how you would or wouldn't do something."

A third teacher solved the problem of competing teacher orientation by suggesting that the teacher being evaluated should be able to choose the evaluator on the basis of her own criteria or preferences. Another teacher extended this idea even further by requesting "Someone who thought about teaching like I do" when asked what outside source she would use to assess her own work.

These findings are consistent with Lortie's (1975) who found that

even though teachers turn to their peers for ideas and help, these suggestions pass through a filter which selectively screens ideas for their appropriateness to that particular teacher. Consequently, style is an important variable in the assessment of teaching competence. What works for one teacher does not necessarily work for another. This raises problems when teachers are asked to evaluate each other, especially when teaching competence is not seen as an objective entity, but rather a subjective one.

An interesting side note to this idiosyncratic view of teaching is that only one respondent mentioned training as a pre-requisite for teachers evaluating their peers, and this training was justified in terms of the personal nature of teaching. This teacher, when asked why evaluating other teachers' would be difficult responded,

> "Because we all look at things in many different ways. . . I think we would have to be trained - helped. No two teachers teach alike - its the end result that counts.

This makes sense if teaching is seen as personal and individually variable versus skill or competency oriented, but an interesting question is why this same notion of individual variability in teaching does not affect the principal's attempts to evaluate teaching. The most that can be said at this point is that this inconsistency as well as other issues uncovered in our interviews point to a type of professional naivete when it comes to the topic of evaluating teachers.

Some Observations

In concluding our work on teacher attitudes toward teacher evaluation

we will focus more on what was not said rather than on what was. What emerged from teachers' comments on all four topics was a lack of knowledge about the over-riding issues involved. Basic measurement concepts such as validity and reliability were seldom if ever mentioned. In their discussion of the use of achievement tests, ways of increasing the validity of these tests through pre- and post-measures and adjusted gains were never mentioned. Perhaps this was due to their strong negative feelings towards the topic. A more likely explanation, we feel, is that teachers have never been asked to think about the topic in a professionally sophisticated manner.

When the teacher spoke of peer evaluations only one teachers out of sixty mentioned the desireability of some kind of training for the evaluators. Again, the impression we got was that teachers had not thought about training as one means of increasing the validity or reliability of peer evaluation visits. And even comments on principal visits were couched in terms of brevity and frequency rather than the more fundamental issues of validity and reliability.

This lack of knowledge about teacher evaluation practices is disturbing on two levels. If teachers are to become thoughtful consumers and participants in teacher evaluation practices they must know which practices are valid and how to improve or remove those that aren't. At a second, more professional level, teachers must become knowledgeable about teacher evaluation practices if they are to take leadership roles in the development of these practices. The need for increased efforts in this area at both the pre-service and in-service areas seems clear.

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Sex _____

Number of years teaching experience _____

Levels Taught _____

Present Teaching Assignment _____

Number of Hours of Post-Baccalaureate _____

Part I. Examine the following teacher education practices and determine their validity in evaluating the quality of teaching. By valid is meant that the practice is relevant, fair and appropriate. (Circle a number for each statement.)

	Invalid						Valid
1. Classroom visits by the principal.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Classroom visits by other teacher(s)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Student evaluations through a questionnaire.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Systematic observation with a check list or observation instrument by a trained observer.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. Pupil achievement as measured by standardized achievement tests.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. Observable teacher skills.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Examination of teaching materials such as syllabi, texts, and handouts.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Teacher self evaluation.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Check list focusing on personal characteristics such as friendliness, grooming, and personal appearance.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Check list focusing on teaching characteristics such as organization, pacing, and clarity.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7

Part II. Circle the number which most reflects your feelings about the following statements.

	Strongly Disagree						Strongly Agree
1. Teachers should be evaluated at least annually.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
2. Teacher evaluation should be used to eliminate incompetent teacher(s).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
3. Teacher evaluation should be used to identify superior teachers.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
4. Teachers should be paid according to how well they teach (merit pay).	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
5. It is possible to identify good teaching when it occurs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. It is possible to identify poor teaching when it occurs.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
7. Most teachers in a school know who the good and bad teachers are in that school.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
8. Most teachers agree on what constitutes good teaching.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. Students can tell if a teacher is a good teacher or not. (Respond in terms of <u>your</u> teaching level)	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
10. Parents of a student are capable of judging if a teacher is a good teacher or not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
11. The principal in a school can tell if a teacher is a good teacher or not.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. Teacher evaluation should only be used to improve teaching and not for retention or firing purposes.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
13. Teachers know if they are doing a good job.	1	2	3	4	5	6	7